



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Pheasant hunters gearing up for highly anticipated season opener



Tens of thousands of hunters in blaze orange will take to the fields when Iowa's pheasant season opens Oct. 31. And with pheasant populations on par with the best counts in the past decade, including six of the nine survey regions averaging more than 20 pheasants per route - the most since 2007, hunters can afford to be optimistic.

"Given how things are lining up for the opener, the weather is the only thing that could throw a wrench in it," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist with the Iowa

Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Success during last year's opener was impacted by a delayed harvest where about 90 percent of the corn and 40 percent of the soybeans were still in the field. This year is the exact opposite with an estimated 65 percent of the corn and 90 percent of the soybeans have already been picked.

The advanced harvest and uptick in the bird numbers is creating interest from pheasant hunters beyond the state's border. Bogenschutz along with other Iowa DNR wildlife staff have been getting a number of calls from nonresident hunters interested in hunting Iowa after the good news from the August pheasant survey.

"It definitely has people asking about our counts, investigating where the better areas are," he said.

Iowa's annual August roadside survey found a statewide average of 20 birds per 30-mile route, an increase over 2019's 17 birds per route. Hunting will be at least as good as last year when 52,000 pheasant hunters harvested an estimated 284,000 roosters.

"If hunter numbers continue their upward trend, we could see the harvest be closer to 2008's when we had about 86,000 pheasant hunters harvest 400,000 roosters," he said. "In 2008, we had 17 birds per route, so we're three birds higher average this year. If we could put the hunters in the field, we could see a bump in the harvest. The population is there to support that."

One piece of advice he said, is that hunters in west central, central and parts of southwest Iowa impacted by the drought should scout the CRP fields they plan to hunt because the habitat could be gone. An emergency declaration from the U.S. Department of Agriculture opened CRP fields in the drought-stricken area to haying 100 percent of fields.

Iowa Pheasant Season

Iowa's pheasant season is Oct. 31-Jan. 10, 2021, shooting hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The daily bag limit is three rooster pheasants with a possession limit of 12. Hunters must have a valid hunting license and habitat fee.

Hunters are required to wear at least one article of external clothing with at least 50 percent of its surface area solid blaze orange: hat, cap, vest, coat, jacket, sweatshirt, shirt or coveralls. The same blaze orange rule applies while hunting quail, gray partridge and ruffed grouse.

August Roadside Survey

Iowa has conducted in one form or another, an annual pheasant survey since 1930s, that was standardized in 1962 to the version conducted today. The survey is used to track pheasant populations and correlated to other datasets on habitat, land use and weather.

"This is how we know how weather impacts pheasants and how land use has changed and that change has impacted pheasant populations," Bogenschutz said. "The data

collected helps with our hunting regulation framework. It's how we know that [closing pheasant season](#) doesn't impact the population."

Hunters want the data on how this year compares to last year and where the better bird counts are, he said.

The August roadside survey covers more than 6,500 miles of routes driven on gravel roads at dawn on mornings with heavy dew. Hen pheasants will move their broods to the edge of the gravel road to dry off before they begin feeding, which makes them easier to count. The statewide survey takes place between Aug. 1-15.

The August roadside survey has been conducted over the same routes since 1962. In addition to pheasants and quail, the survey collects data on partridge, cottontails and jackrabbits.

Iowa's youth enjoy special pheasant season Oct. 24-25

Iowa's young hunters will get to experience the first cackle and flush of the year during the youth only pheasant season Oct. 24-25.

The residents-only youth season gives Iowans age 15 and younger the opportunity to hunt for rooster pheasants without purchasing a license, habitat fee or taking hunter education. Youths must hunt under direct supervision of an adult age 18 or older that has a valid hunting license and habitat fee.

Special youth only seasons allows young hunters an opportunity for success without pressure or competition from other hunters. Only the youth are allowed shoot pheasants and they may bag one rooster per day.

Online Hunting Atlas offers places to go

Iowa hunters have been using the interactive Iowa hunting atlas to find new places to go hunting. The hunting atlas features more than 680,000 acres of public hunting land that is owned by the state, county or federal governments. It's available online at www.iowadnr.gov/hunting.

This tool allows hunters to see which zone the public area is in, type of shot allowed, wildlife likely to be found, get an overhead look at the terrain and a downloadable or printable map. The mobile version of the atlas will show hunter location on the area if granted permission.

The atlas view from above allows hunters to zoom in on an area, see how to get there, the lay of the land and where one parcel of public hunting land is in relation to others and print off maps.

Information is updated as public hunting lands are acquired.

The hunting atlas also includes private land enrolled in the Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) where private landowners receive assistance to improve habitat on their land in exchange for opening the property for hunter access.

Site maps are available at www.iowadnr.gov/ihap showing boundaries, which species would be most likely attracted to the habitat and the location of a comment box where hunters are encouraged to leave their feedback on the program.

Walk-in public hunting through IHAP is available between September 1 and May 31.

Media Contact: Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-979-0828.

Trumpeter swan study following young for first year of life



A family of swans that will be followed as part of the trumpeter swan survival and movement study. The male has a GPS collar and the cygnets have green neck collars with unique alphanumeric identification. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is asking Iowans to help with a research project designed to learn more about trumpeter swan survival during the cygnets' first year of life that will help to better manage and conserve this species.

"We want to get eyes on these birds every two weeks to verify the number of cygnets and see what habitat they're using," said Anna Buckardt Thomas, avian ecologist with the Iowa DNR.

The Iowa project is part of a larger population wide movement study on the interior population of trumpeter swans that is being led by the University of Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and involves six states and provinces that are part of the Mississippi Flyway Council - Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Manitoba, and Ohio.

Trumpeter swans stay together as a family group for the cygnets' first year of life, while they learn how to feed and survive the winter. Most of the data collection as part of Iowa's project will occur now through June of 2021, once the breeding season is in full swing and the adult pair have run off their young so they can raise another brood.

The DNR targeted family groups as part of the study and captured the swans this summer while one adult was molting and flightless and before the cygnets could fly, resulting in 51 swans receiving collars this summer – nine adults received GPS units and

42 cygnets received green, numbered neck collars. This is the first time the Iowa DNR has placed GPS tracking devices on trumpeter swans.

"We would release the family together after capture to make sure they stayed together afterwards," Buckardt Thomas said. "We're interested in knowing where any swan with a collar is hanging out."

The DNR has set up an interactive form online at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Iowa-Wildlife/Trumpeter-Swans> where Iowans can report any neck collared swans and where they saw them.

The GPS collars are solar powered and record accurate locations every 15 minutes. They connect with cell phone towers to upload data directly to researchers twice each day and can record data for up to three years. There is an up-to-date map of swan locations online at <https://trumpeterswan.netlify.app/>

As for the Iowa collared trumpeter swans, Buckardt Thomas said she hopes Iowans continue to report the bird's locations beyond the life of the study.

"If people come across them, they can report to the website," she said. "It's a way for us to learn more about the behavior and movements of trumpeter swans once their parents kick them out."

Media Contact: Anna Buckardt Thomas, Avian Ecologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-823-3945.

DNR's launches new learn to hunt Iowa online video series

Over the past year, the Iowa DNR has partnered with Iowa Safari Club International and several other organizations to create a free, online video series that provides new hunters or existing hunters wanting to try something new, the information, skills, and resources needed to get out in the hunting field!

This 23 video series provides hunting enthusiasts with information on how to find a place to hunt, how to purchase a license, selecting a shotgun, selecting a compound bow, how to call ducks and geese, small game hunting basics, how to dress for the outdoors, turkey hunting basics, predator hunting basics, fur handling, common wildlife diseases, and much more.

To check out the new online video series and many other resources to get you started on your hunting journey or to expand your hunting knowledge and skills, visit: www.iowadnr.gov/learntohunt.

"Self-help resources and videos have been continuing to grow in popularity," said Megan Wisecup, hunter education coordinator for the Iowa DNR. "We wanted to be able to offer those interested in hunting and trapping some credible resources to help expand their knowledge and skills as they grow and develop as a hunter and/or trapper. These types of resources paired with our in-person and virtual workshops will ensure that we are

meeting the demands of our sportsmen and women to help build comfort and confidence in their abilities to hunt and trap a variety of game species in our state.”

The project was completed thanks to the support from the Iowa Chapter Safari Club International, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever, Delta Waterfowl, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Iowa Bowhunters Association, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Izaak Walton League, Jax Outdoor Gear Farm and Ranch, Archery Trade Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Iowa Hunter Education Instructor Association, Whitetails Unlimited and the Iowa DNR.

Media Contact: Megan Wisecup, Hunter Education Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-238-4968.

Portions of Wilson Island reopens to visitors, campground area remains closed

A portion of Wilson Island State Recreation Area was reopened to the public on Thursday, for hunting, hiking and for boaters to access the Missouri River and Backwater Chute, 19 months after floodwaters first inundated the public area, and then stayed for nine months.

Wilson Island’s popular campground and associated camping facilities will remain closed as work continues to get it back open for the spring of 2021.

While the campground remains closed, the public can access the 500 plus acre recreation area for hunting, to view fall colors or go for a scenic drive. There’s roughly five miles of trails available for hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and mountain biking. The public will notice a few signs that restrict vehicle access for public safety reasons.

“We are much looking forward to getting reopened, not just for camping,” said Michael Johnson, of Missouri Valley, president of Friends of Wilson Island since the group was formed in 2008. “We go hiking quite a bit, our friends hunt there. For the fishermen, Wilson Island has one of the busiest boat ramps when its open.”

The boat ramp is especially popular because there is no fee to use it and it’s on the non-channel side, which means it’s easier to get in and out of the water, Johnson said. Plus, it allows hunters to boat to Backwater Chute which gives duck hunters access to a public universally accessible hunting blind developed as an Eagle Scout project.

With Wilson Island being designated as a state recreation area rather than a state park, it means hunting is allowed on the entire area, except for within 200 yards from the campground or other developed sites.

With deer seasons underway and the late split of the Missouri River duck season opening on Oct. 24, the reopening of this recreation area should be welcomed by hunters. Next spring, the reopening good news will, weather permitting, shift to camping.

“Camping is an important component at Wilson Island and we’re working to get the redesigned campground reopened ahead of the 2021 camping season. The new campground will have fewer campsites and be redesigned to minimize the impact of future Missouri River flooding,” said Michelle Reinig, State Parks, Forests and Preserves southwest district supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Media Contact: Michelle Reinig, State Parks, Forests and Preserves Southwest District Supervisor, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-769-2587.

DNR to hold virtual public meeting for timber sale at Wapsipinicon State Park

ANAMOSA, Iowa – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will hold a virtual public meeting on Thursday, October 22 at 10:00am to discuss a timber sale at Wapsipinicon State Park.

The sale will include trees damaged by the derecho as well as some others that have been removed due to an upcoming construction project.

Members of the public can also submit comments from now until October 22 by [email](#) or by calling (319) 462-2761.

Anyone wishing to participate in the virtual public comment meeting via Zoom can do so via this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7794312185>.

For any questions, please contact Jason Dykstra at (319) 462-2761 or Jason.Dykstra@dnr.iowa.gov.

Clear Lake boat ramp closed

Clear Lake – The boat ramp on Clear Lake at Ventura Access is closed while a new boat ramp is installed.

Other boat ramps on Clear Lake will remain open, including at McIntosh Woods State Park.

Media Contacts: Scott Grummer, Fisheries Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-357-3517 or Tammy Domonoske, McIntosh Woods State Park Manager, 641-829-3847.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is working with state and local officials to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and has transitioned employees to work remotely. DNR offices are closed to the public during this time and only available by appointment.

In other efforts to further reduce the spread of Covid-19, the DNR is encouraging the use of the online services for purchasing licenses, submitting applications, payments and

other daily tasks and interaction with DNR staff.

The FREE Go Outdoors Iowa app is available at the App store and Google Play. The Go Outdoors Iowa app allows users to purchase and view hunting and fishing licenses and submit harvest and quota reports, all from your cell phone.

Full list of DNR's online services: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/about-dnr/about-dnr/online-services-databases>.

Up-to-date information on DNR services, facilities and events impacted by Covid-19: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/Covid-19>.

Technical information for regulated businesses in regards to Covid-19: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/Social-Media-Press-Room/Disaster-Assistance#3057321-covid---19-outbreak>.

Thank you for your patience and flexibility during this time. If you need to contact DNR staff you can reach them by email or phone or by calling (515) 725-8200.